

## REMINISCENCES OF AN AMATEUR LEPIDOPTERIST 1920-1990

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Much of the plain surrounding Baghdad was mud desert, subject to annual inundations, rather unproductive entomologically, so I took every opportunity at weekends and holidays of seeking more stony terrain, particularly the low hills through which the Dyala flowed north of the city, where a sojourn in the tent of two English surveyors, Meade and Woram, distracted them from their isolated boredom, and enabled to take back more interesting specimens. Friends in Kurdistan also sent specimens of the vernal fliers.

I met Robert Ellison during my 1936 summer-leave. Our exchanges eventually led me to the Royal Entomological Society's 1939 *Lepidoptera of the Lebanon* from our joint pens, Tams' assistance having played a vital part in its production.

I sent Edward Meyrick, at Marlborough, my Lebanese and first Kurdish Pyralis and Micros; he produced some prompt results in *Exotic Microlepidoptera 5*: 18-142 (1936-7); but in 1937 I sent Amsel my Iraqi material and in 1939 my Iranian Pyralis and Micros. His published results did not appear until 1949.

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## 6. Further acquaintance

During my 1936 leave the realisation dawned on me that it would take some time to determine all my material from the Middle East, a part of the world not as well represented then as were most other parts of the world, in the BMNH.

It appeared that some *Earias* which I had bred from poplars at Baghdad were unknown.

“Won't you describe it for me?” I asked Tams.

“Just now,” he replied, “I haven’t the time; there is no reason why you shouldn’t describe it yourself;” then he added: “if you’re careful.”

Tams later passed my first effort at describing a new species to Riley and it appeared in *The Entomologist* in October 1936. A decent illustration had to wait until I figured several forms of *Earias irakana* in a colour plate in my much later book on Iraq (1957).

I had broken the ice but was still diffident about describing new species from my own material. In one or two subsequent cases I would describe a strange form as a sub-species of some similar known species, only to have to publish a later correction demonstrating the true specific character. In the late 'thirties I had not yet acquired the expertise that gives confidence in such puzzles. I first started using a microscope in New York in 1944 thanks partly to having been given a monocular microscope by a medical cousin, and partly by meeting in that big city other entomologists to advise and encourage, which in Iraq and Iran had to be done by post, and without any local facilities. My first binocular microscope was a secondhand Zeiss acquired in Cairo in 1946. Here again there were facilities, colleagues and an entomological society. But I anticipate unduly . . .

Of course the mere acquisition of a microscope does not automatically solve all the problems.

Comparing one’s specimens with labelled specimens in good collections is a first step for all collectors, but already in 1936 I realised that identifications are based ultimately on original type specimens preserved more carefully than all others; the author having had these types before him when writing the original description. So besides the obvious educational purpose of our Museums, of providing information for the public, a more vital one is to conserve and study the types and other material, such as original manuscripts and drawings, a sort of back-room function.

Trained officials in Museums, with rich comparative material, have described thousands of species but left undescribed many others, for lack of time, due to curational, administrative and such duties. The untrained amateur can help science by following the correct procedure in referring to original types or descriptions, and with experience may become honorary associates such as Collenette and Evans whom I found working together with Riley and Tams in the 'thirties. Ultimately museums come to own most surviving original types, as private collections seldom remain in the hands of the heirs of those who have built them up. Such collections are more scientifically important, the more types of recently described species they contain; perfection of presentation and the length of the series of each species are of secondary importance, despite their desirability.

I passed through Paris on my way back to the Middle East in 1936, and met Charles Boursin at the Natural History Museum there. I had already received many helpful letters from him. He introduced me to his colleagues there, among whom LeCerf helped me with Iraqi Sesiids and Cossids. At

Boursin's suggestion I started to subscribe to the Munich entomological society's *Mitteilungen*, as its members were already active in the Middle East. They were pleased to publish in 1939 my third "Early stages" article, mainly describing caterpillars found in the Baghdad poplars and tamarisks. Its plate showed the difference in larval pattern of the Iraqi *Cerura*, now known as *C. vinula irakana* Heyd. & Schulte, from the British puss-moth, the typical *C. vinula* (L.) and joy of my boyhood as mentioned in my first chapter. A similar difference, between two Spanish *Cerura* was much later depicted by Templado & Ortiz, 1970, figs. 1 - 4. Does *C. iberica* T. & O. in this respect diverge from *vinula* and converge to *C. v. irakana* because of environmentally similar influences? As there is no simple answer to that question, I will leave it unanswered here.

Two Baghdad forms of *Nola* were the subject of an enquiry I addressed in 1936 to Georg Warnecke of Kiel, whose thoughtful work had come recently to my attention.

While my correspondence was daily widening in this manner, using my car when on home-leave enabled me to do field-work en route. Returning home in 1936 I revisited some old haunts in the Lebanon and also Bludan in the Anti-Lebanon range; and in the autumn I deviated northwards from Beirut to proceed eastwards along the IPC pipe-line, spending nights at the Palmyra and Haditha pumping stations, both of which provided supper, a comfortable bed and bright lights that attracted autumnal desert moths such as *Chondrostega fasciana feisali* Wilts, which flew there at the end of September. After crossing the Euphrates, I turned north and revisited Mosul and Diana for a few days; to the latter I was accompanied by the newly-appointed Consul, Grafftey-Smith. Coming from Cairo, he must have been amused by the thatched roof, and bare trunks supporting it, over the veranda of the Diana Vice-Consulate; at any rate its photo appeared in his book of reminiscences written in retirement; and of course, the trip supplied further problems for Boursin, Amsel and others to solve.

One spring weekend in 1937 I drove out south-westward from Baghdad to the more southerly, but gravelly, desert west of the Euphrates towns of Kerbela and Nejf, where I also had official contacts protecting British-Indian Shi'a pilgrims. Jock Diamond was an amusing Glaswegian driller, whom I had met in 1935 when he was drilling water-wells for the Shammar nomads in the desert west of Mosul. Since then his wife had joined him, having decided to curb his excessive generosity. Jock now had a larger tent and bed, and was no less hospitable to me than two years before. Entomologically, too, the visit was a success, especially as Jock continued to send me specimens, from his drilling site, well into the summer of 1937. Boursin, at my behest, named one of the discoveries there *diamondi* in his honour. Mr and Mrs Diamond continued to prosper, and became well-known in an Alwiya bungalow in the capital.

Bytinski-Salz, having transferred from Germany to Italy had started



Jock Diamond at Habbarivah, Iraq

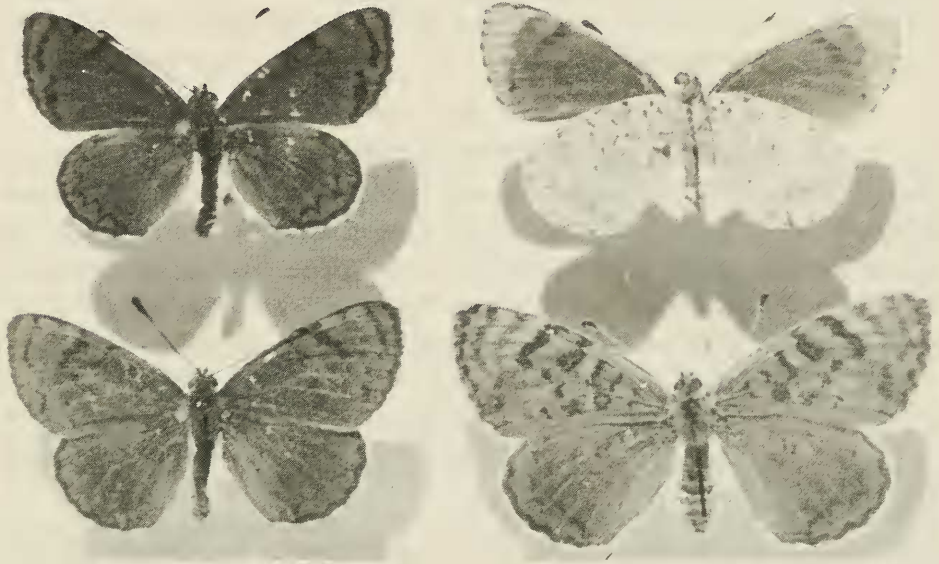
helping a certain Wilhelm Brandt to describe his new species from Northern Iran. The article, without illustrations, appeared in the *Entomologists' Record* from 1937 onwards. Brandt himself wrote to me later that year, about his brother Fred who was collecting somewhere in S. Iran. I myself was posted to Tehran late that year; and I shall have more to tell of the Brandt brothers, and some others of the above correspondents, in later chapters.

I had started learning Persian under Tahir Qureishi, the Baghdad Consulate's Protector of Pilgrims, and on reaching Tehran found that I was a "stepney-wheel" (as Jack Finch expressed it), liable to be sent to scattered British Consulates in Persia, during their officers' leaves. During 1937-8 I acted in Tabriz (a winter stay), then Ahwaz with its mountain station, Hamadan, after which I took a home leave in winter 1938-9 and left the boxes of that long summer's catches with my mother at Gorleston; during my visits to London my contacts gave me the impression that war with Hitler was almost inevitable despite Chamberlain's little trip to Munich while I was at Ahwaz. It was at the end of my acting spell in summer 1939 in Tehran that war in fact broke out. I acted that winter in Kermanshah, and in April was transferred to Shiraz, which I found the most attractive of all these posts. It confirmed my love for Persia and its people. Their history has been full of vicissitudes. Recent developments have shewn this too painfully.

At first, after the declaration of war, Iran was fully neutral, and British and German nationals continued to live and work normally; after two or three years, however, the Anglo-Russian military intervention took place, to protect the passage of munitions and motor transport which the newly constructed railway from the Gulf to the Caspian providentially expedited. Our German acquaintances were then mostly rounded up and sent off to Australia.

Wilhelm Brandt, of German extraction but holding an Esthonian

passport and residing in Finland, was a neutral. For three years we consulted each other on entomological problems and he sent me his reprints with details of Fred's 1938 "ausbeute". Good though my own catches at Ahwaz and Hamadan had been I could see from these details that Shiraz was in a class of its own; for instance Fred had taken five different species of *Melitaea* near there, including *M. casta* Koll. on the top of Barm-i-Firuz, near Ardekan. To my amazement I was able to add three apparently new species of *Melitaea* in my first three months at Shiraz. I sent



*Melitaea casta* Koll. Topotypes from Kuh Barfi, Shiraz.

papered examples of one or two to Henry Turner and Norman Riley. The latter was in touch with Lionel Higgins, and told me that Lionel had a more comprehensive knowledge of this genus than any other lepidopterist. I photographed all eight of the Fars *Melitaea* forms and when sending these to Riley mentioned the boxes left at Gorleston. He arranged for these to be transferred from my home to the Castle Museum, Norwich, and eventually Higgins was able to see them, but not in time for illustration in his 1941 catalogue. In an addendum to his 1955 article the three forms of *M. casta* were illustrated, and Brandt's Barm-i-Firuz race appeared as "transitional" between the Alvand and the typical Kuh-i-Barfi (Shiraz) race, though I had suggested the name *brandti* for it. All three mountain peaks are completely isolated from each other.

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### 7. The Indian Connection

Lads of the Indian Political Service still staffed the Residency at Bushire in the early forties; Shiraz was their "hill station" and they rented a garden next to the Consulate. Geoffrey Prior, the Resident, suggested I might be interested to subscribe to the Bombay Natural History Society, a name I knew from that book on the *Fauna of Iraq* picked up at Baghdad.

I carried out his suggestion which was a stroke of luck for me. I married in Tehran in 1942 on transfer to a new post, but the critical juncture of the war in May of that year made travel to England out of the question while communications with India were easy.

After a day or two in Karachi waiting for a plane, we reached Bombay and spent a week there. Prater, the Society's secretary, showed me over their rooms in Apollo Street ("Hornbill House"); as editor he had already published my articles of 1941 describing *Melitaea* new forms and new moths from S.W. Iran; now the precious types were in his custody and he promised to look after them until further orders. I had received news of my next post: Basra, and I thought the Society's rooms in Bombay a safer place. Thus reassured I took my wife on a honeymoon trek in Kashmir, an unforgettable experience. In spite of the threat to India on the eastern frontier, this part's touring facilities and agencies were still ticking over like clockwork. Some ten years later I wrote a narrative of the trek including some wonderful scenic photos and dealing with the general natural history of that part of the Himalayas.

So my second spell in Iraq began in the extreme south and I investigated the Shatt al Arab date-growing zone and the desert in the direction of Kuwait. For two months, over Christmas 1942, however, I had to act as Consul again in Mosul.

(to be continued)